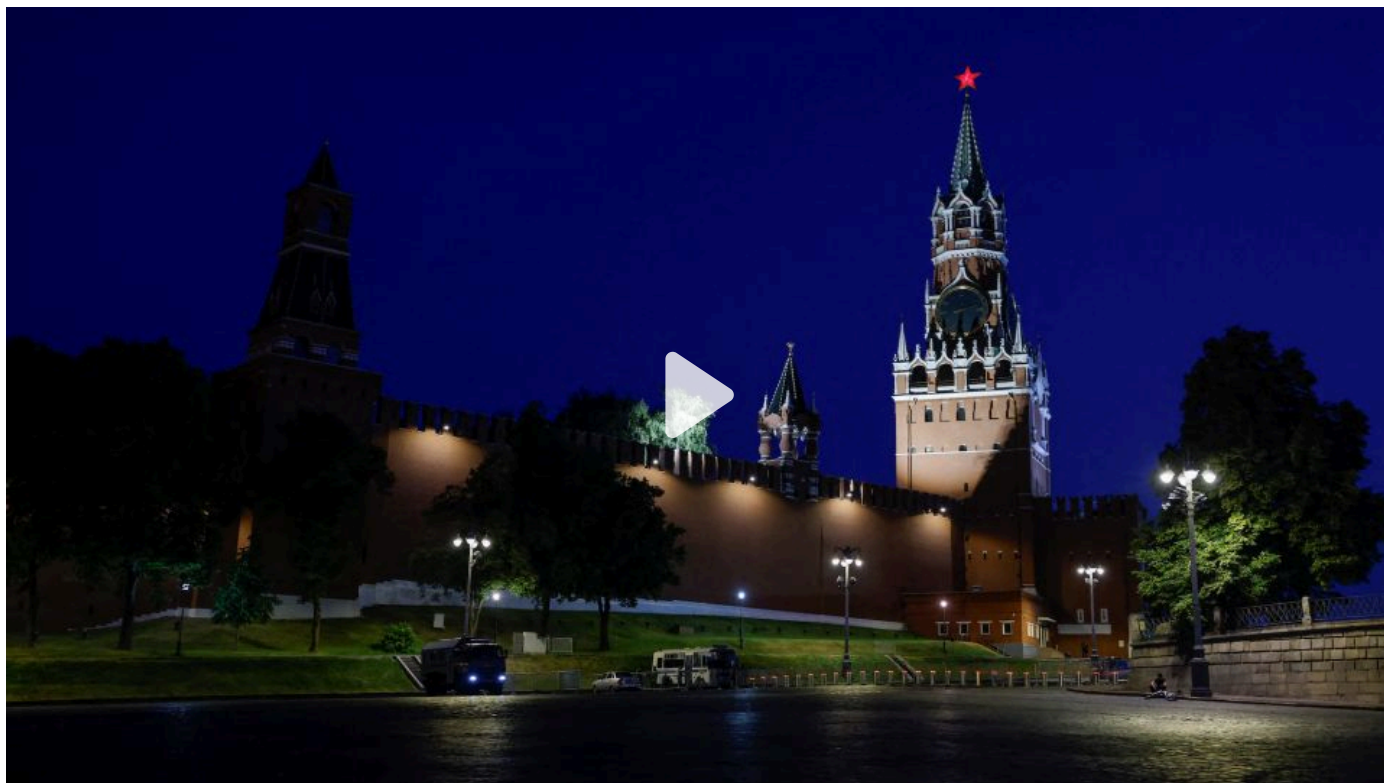


Exclusive: Russia attempting to develop nuclear space weapon to destroy satellites with massive energy wave, sources familiar with intel say

By [Katie Bo Lillis](#), [Jim Sciutto](#), [Kristin Fisher](#) and [Natasha Bertrand](#), CNN

🕒 5 minute read · Updated 7:57 AM EST, Sat February 17, 2024

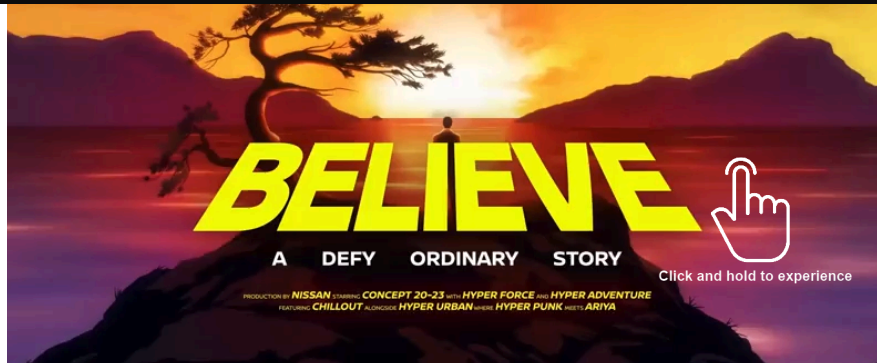


🔊 Video Ad Feedback

New details emerge on potential Russian nuclear space weapon

02:00 - Source: [CNN](#)

See More Videos



These sources gave CNN a more detailed understanding of what Russia is working on – and the threat it could pose – than the US government has previously disclosed.

Republican Rep. Mike Turner of Ohio, the chair of the House Intelligence Committee, set off a frenzy in Washington on Wednesday when he issued a statement saying his panel “had information concerning a serious national security threat.” By Friday, President Joe Biden had publicly confirmed that Turner was referring to a new Russian nuclear anti-satellite capability — but officials have steadfastly refused to discuss it further, citing the highly classified nature of the intelligence.

The weapon is still under development and is not yet in orbit, Biden administration officials have emphasized publicly. But if used, officials say, it would cross a dangerous rubicon in the history of nuclear weapons and could cause extreme disruptions to everyday life in ways that are difficult to predict.

This kind of new weapon — known generally by military space experts as a nuclear EMP — would create a pulse of electromagnetic energy and a flood of highly charged particles that would tear through space to disrupt other satellites winging around Earth.

Biden on Friday emphasized publicly that there is “no nuclear threat to the people of America or anywhere else in the world with what Russia is doing at the moment.”

“Anything that they’re doing and/or they will do relates to satellites and space and damaging those satellites, potentially,” he said.

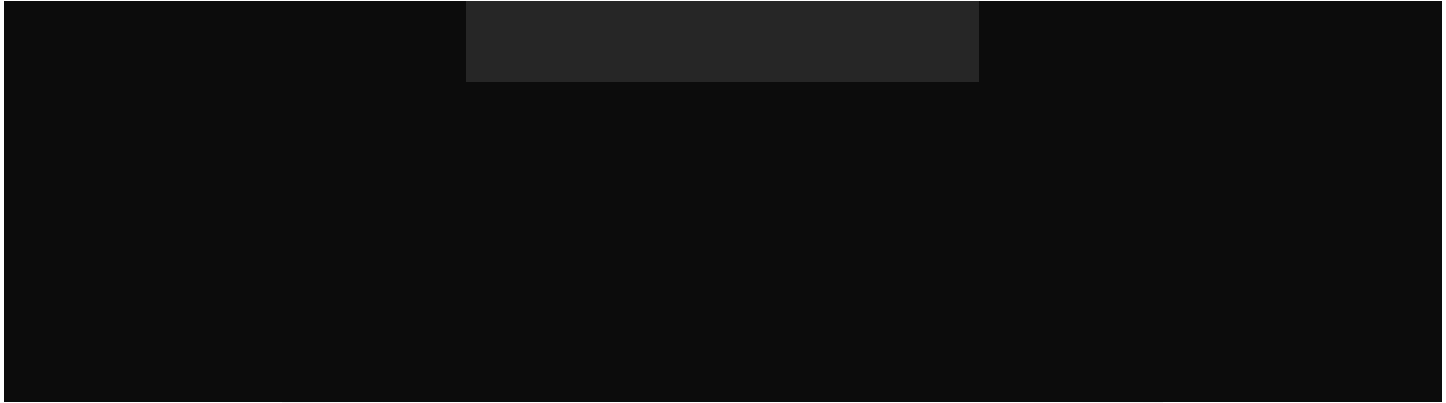


The Defense Department and the intelligence community have tracked Russian efforts to develop a broad range of anti-satellite weapons, including an EMP, for years.

And there has been a stream of intelligence reporting in recent months related specifically to Russia’s efforts to develop nuclear-powered anti-satellite capabilities, according to one defense official.

But Russia has recently made progress in its efforts to develop a nuclear EMP — a related but far more alarming technology.

“Our general knowledge of Russian pursuit of this kind of capability goes back many, many months, if not a



“It’s not a new concept and, as a concept, dates back to the late Cold War,” said one US official. But, they said, “the big fear with any eventual EMP device in orbit [is] it might render large portions of particular orbits unusable” by creating a minefield of disabled satellites that “would then prove dangerous to any new satellites we might try to put up to replace or repair the existing satellites.”

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Defense Department and the National Security Council all declined to comment.

It was not immediately clear whether the device as designed could impact GPS and nuclear command and control satellites, which operate in a higher orbit than the vast constellation of commercial and government satellites whizzing through low-Earth orbit. Those larger satellites are designed to be impregnable to a nuclear blast, but a former top space official at the Pentagon told CNN that “they could be vulnerable” depending on how close they were to the EMP, how old they are and how big the blast.

‘Last-ditch weapon’

Experts say this kind of weapon could have the potential to wipe out mega constellations of small satellites, like SpaceX’s Starlink, which has been successfully used by Ukraine in its ongoing war with Russia.

This would almost certainly be “a last-ditch weapon” for Russia, the US official and other sources said — because it would do the same damage to whatever Russian satellites were also in the area.

It also remains unclear how well-developed the technology is. Russia has had a number of public debacles with their nuclear technology in recent years. In 2019, seven Russians were killed in a nuclear accident that occurred while Moscow was trying to recover a nuclear-powered cruise missile that had crashed into the White Sea during a failed test.

Still, a recent intelligence assessment on Russian progress so alarmed some lawmakers on Capitol Hill that Turner issued an invitation to all members of the House to be read in on the matter.

Shortly thereafter, he issued the vague public statement that forced the issue into the public eye.

Several sources familiar with the matter said that the exposure of the intelligence was extremely damaging because the source was incredibly sensitive. According to those sources, the intelligence community is now

Up next

US says Russia used choking agents against Ukrainian troops, breaching chemical weapons ban

4 minute read



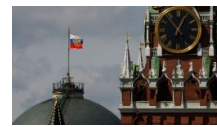
What we know about the Moscow concert hall attack

8 minute read



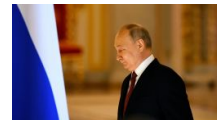
Russia says it killed large number of Ukrainian soldiers with 'vacuum bomb' in claim Kyiv calls nonsense

2 minute read



Appalling Moscow terror attack is a blow to Putin, who promised Russia security

3 minute read



Putin's glaring mistake

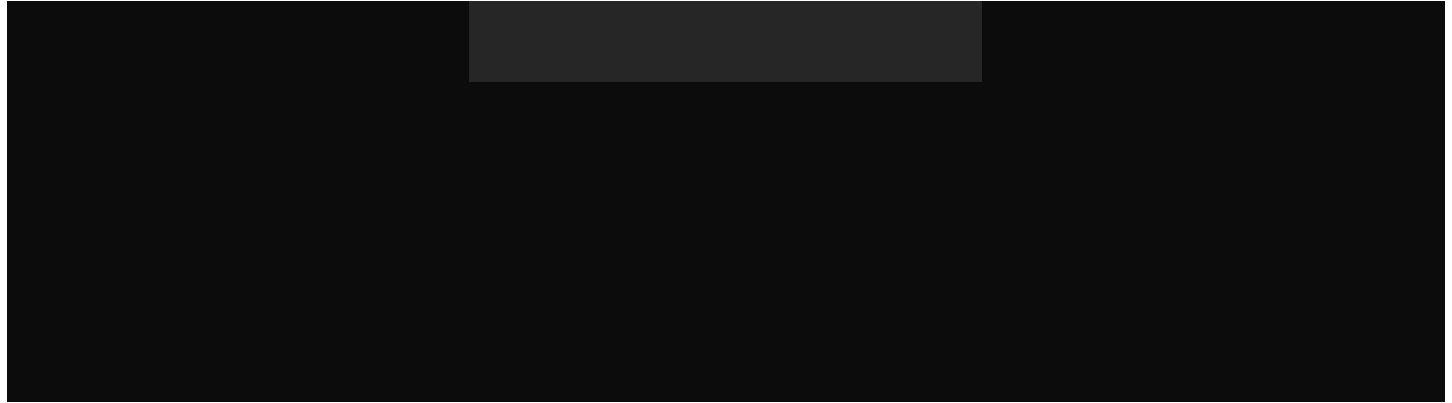
4 minute read



OPINION

Most read

- 1 It's been two years since the UK's poop-engulfed beaches became a national scandal. Now it's even worse
- 2 Your body needs these three forms of movement every week
- 3 The moment Trump defied gravity is coming back to haunt him
- 4 Kenan Thompson is supportive of college protests as long as they don't involve his daughter in 'SNL' cold open
- 5 Trump's bombardment of dishonesty: Fact-checking 32 of his false claims to Time
- 6 Vegas 'Lovers & Friends' festival featuring Janet Jackson, Mary J. Blige canceled less than 24 hours before opening



MORE FROM CNN



US says Russia used choking agents against Ukrainian troops, ...



Russia says it killed large number of Ukrainian soldiers with 'vacuum ...



US secretly sent long-range missiles to Ukraine after months of ...

NEWS & BUZZ



It's been two years since the UK's poop-engulfed beaches became ...



Your body needs these three forms of movement every week



The moment Trump defied gravity is coming back to haunt him

Live TV

Listen

Watch

- World
- US Politics
- Business
- Health
- Entertainment
- Tech
- Style
- Travel
- Sports
- Watch
- Features
- Weather
- Ukraine-Russia War
- Israel-Hamas War
- More



FOLLOW CNN POLITICS



[Terms of Use](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Manage Cookies+](#) [Ad Choices](#) [Accessibility & CC](#) [About](#) [Newsletters](#) [Transcripts](#)

© 2024 Cable News Network. A Warner Bros. Discovery Company. All Rights Reserved.
CNN Sans ™ & © 2016 Cable News Network.

